

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

## Mental Health: SAD

Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is a recurring depression that affects individuals during the cold winter months and then recedes during the spring and summer.

### How Common is SAD?

It is estimated that between four and six percent of Americans suffer from SAD, with three-quarters of those affected being women, mostly in their 20's, 30's and 40's. Though SAD is most common during these ages, it can also occur in children, adolescents and the elderly.

### What Causes SAD?

The exact cause of SAD is still unknown, but researchers suspect that an increased level of melatonin in the blood could be a factor. Melatonin increases the need and desire to sleep. SAD affects people more during the colder, darker months because the body produces more melatonin during this time. Decreased exposure to sunlight resulting in an increased production of melatonin causes the biological clock that regulates

mood, sleep and hormones to run slower in winter. This is why those most affected by SAD tend to live in northern states; areas that experience decreased daylight for months at a time.

### What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms of SAD can vary, depending on the severity of the condition, but generally include:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Low energy and fatigue
- Decreased interest in daily activities, especially social activities
- Moodiness and irritability
- Increased appetite with weight gain
- Cravings for carbohydrates
- Increased sleep, with more daytime sleepiness
- Loss of interest in sex

### Coping with SAD

In severe cases your doctor

can prescribe medication, but oftentimes self-help tactics can be just as effective:

- Increase the amount of light in your home. Open blinds, add skylights and trim trees that block sunlight.
- Get outside. Walk outdoors on sunny days, even during winter months.
- Exercise regularly. Physical exercise helps relieve stress and anxiety, which can exacerbate SAD.
- Find ways to relax.
- Learn how to better manage stress.
- Take a trip. If possible, take winter vacations to sunny, warm destinations.



### Did You Know...?

If you frequently suffer from the "winter blues," you are not alone and it's not just something you have to tough out. Talk with your doctor so you can both work together to find an effective treatment.